

INTRODUCTION:

Children of God, today we are going to begin a new series in the letter of 1 John. It will not be nearly as long as my series in Mark, praise the Lord.

Now this is the same John that wrote the gospel of John and the book of Revelation. This is John, the son of Zebedee, and the brother of James. John, and James, and Peter made up the core of the 12 apostles.

Now John, has been known as the apostle of Love. As is evident throughout his writings, love is an important and recurring theme. But John was not always known for his emphasis on love. In the early days of Jesus' ministry he was known with his brother James as one of the Sons of Thunder. They probably received that name because in Luke 9:54 the Samaritans did not receive Jesus, and so James and John said, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven and consume them?"

So John was transformed by Christ's for him, and it has so shaped him that he become known as the apostle of Love, instead of the apostle of thunder. Praise the Lord. It is my hope that through this brief letter Christ would so transform us that we would be known more for our love than for our hatred as well.

Now, if you have ever read 1 John, and I suggest you do, you will notice that John says many of the same things over and over again. The structure of the letter is almost elusive and is difficult to discern. Most commentators think that this letter was in fact a homily from John to a group of churches, perhaps the seven churches in Asia Minor that John writes to in Revelation. But we are not sure exactly who are the intended recipients. But that doesn't matter really, because the letter is ultimately for us today.

The things he says are not overly complicated technical theological terms. Rather, John speaks the truth with a simplistic straightforward, black and white language that is geared toward children. Children is what he calls

the recipients of this letter over and over. This is probably a term of affection from a father of the church to his disciples of all ages.

This simple language he uses conjures up imagery of some of the very first truths that children would learn. Basic foundational images and concepts through which we learn to interpret the world. For example, he uses words such as light, darkness, life, truth, lies, fellowship, love, hate, God, Christ, commandment, sin, and others. His language is very plain, and accessible enough for children to understand. And yet these concepts are also extremely profound and if we were to plunge into the depths of them, would we most likely drown.

As we read this letter it becomes clear that John is writing for specific purposes.

In 1:3 he is writing so that we may have fellowship with the apostles

In 1:4 he is writing our joy may be complete.

In 2:21 he is writing because we know the truth.

In 2:26 He is writing because there are people who are trying to deceive them

In 5:13 He is writing so that you may believe in the Son of God and know you have eternal life

Interestingly, if you wanted to get the gist of what 1 John is about, it seems that 2 John is a tightly condensed version of 1 John.

OCCASION

And so, what we can discern about the occasion of the letter? There are false teachers, antichrists John calls them, who are trying to deceive the children of God. And John's mission is to combat those errors by positive statements of the truth, and ethical exhortations to not believe the lies,

and to not sin, but rather to believe the truth, and to love God and one another. Very basic.

Now, John doesn't go into much detail about what those false beliefs are that he is writing against, except in 2:22 - "Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son." And in 4:2 he states it in a more positive way - "every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not from God."

From these brief statements and some other pieces of information, the details of the error that were being taught seems to be a form of Judaizing Proto-Gnosticism and Docetism. Docetism was a heresy that taught the Jesus only seemed to be human. He was actually a spirit, or a phantom, an apparition, or even an angel. But it only seemed that he had flesh. Hence, John's claim that the spirit of antichrist is one who denies Jesus came in the flesh.

Gnosticism developed a bit later on in the second century, but the core tenants are that matter is evil or bad, and the material world is something to escape from, and salvation comes by secret knowledge - gnosis is the Greek word for knowledge, hence - Gnosticism. Those who have the knowledge are in the inner circle, and if you are in the inner circle you are saved. But if you do not have the knowledge, you are an outsider and are not saved. And if a person has all the secret knowledge so that they are in the know, they will escape the confines of the body when they die and become one with the universe and with cosmic consciousness, essentially. Living forever in an unbodied experience. Interestingly, this is what many Christians even believe today regarding the eternal state.

Finally, before I get into the text, it is important I think to state what some of the cultural reasons were that led the Jews to embrace some of these heresies.

Firstly, there became an ever increasing sense that God was more disconnected and separated from the world than what previous Jews believed. God himself, in the belief of the people, had become remote and distant, and yet at the same time there was more belief in the spirit realm of angels and demons and spirits. So as belief in God's closeness began to diminish, and God became more distant, belief in the angelic mediators increased. Similarly today, while belief in God has decreased in America, there has been a surge in the paranormal and more and more people believe in ghosts and even aliens.

Also, with the sense of hedonism and rampant immorality, there was a loss of confidence in the sense of existence. With all the chaos of life, the people only living for pleasure, which is a cheap and shallow existence as you can get, a sense of wanting more than what the world offered led these Jews to seek for meaning in something other than pleasure and tradition. They were skeptical with the traditions of the father, and their skepticism and doubt of the divine wisdom of the Scriptures, led them to a search for a hidden knowledge of why things were the way they were. And by attaining that knowledge they could then escape the corruption of the world.

In short, what we see in first and second century Gnosticism is nothing less than a movement of people who have rejected their traditions and historical identity, and who are seeking to transform themselves through the quest of secret knowledge.

I mention this, because this strikes me as applicable to our circumstances today, in which we have a once Christian people who are rejecting their traditions and identities, even hating themselves because of the immorality that they see in the world. The way out of this cycle of sin is to get woke, to gain an awakening of the great sin of white supremacy, which if you believe and know, you will be saved. All who embrace such knowledge eventually develop a hatred for their past traditions and people

and heritage, but even worse they hate their white neighbor. These are not by products of these beliefs, hatred for whites has itself become a virtue.

And so, with the loss of the sense of God and of any meaning of existence, and with only pleasure to guide, a vacuum is created in the life of society and people are left for themselves their own meaning to life and identity. And the source of their own individual salvation, so to say, is found in a rejection of biological reality. Instead, their life's meaning is fulfilled and made manifest in the thoughts of their own mind. The matter of their actual biological sex is irrelevant. So Wokeness and Gender Confusion and the many other aspects of sexual confusion are different manifestation of the old Gnostic heresies. And so, I believe that we will find much in 1 John that can help us navigate the issues of our own day.

PROLOGUE

Today we are only going to look at the Prologue, which is 1:1-4:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— ² the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— ³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

LIFE

The thing that John is talking about here is the word of Life. He refers to it as the Life, and again as Eternal Life. Three times John references the Life as being the subject of his homily. What about this life?

First off, this life is the word of Life which was from the beginning:

The word Beginning invokes Genesis 1, "*In the beginning God created the Heaven and the earth.*" The creation of the world and of life by the word of God is what constitutes the Beginning. John also begins his gospel with this same imagery, saying, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.*"

So John is letting us know that what he is talking about here is the very source of creation and all existence – the word of Life. God spoke all things into existence. All of reality, seen and unseen, material and immaterial is made up of the Living and Eternal word, which was with God and was God in the beginning. The word is the source of all Life, therefore John calls him the word of Life. God has not chosen to keep his life all to himself, but the life that exists between the Father and the Son he now shares it with us humans by becoming one with us. Life is meant to be shared and held in common together.

And yet, John says, we – the apostles - heard this Word and seen it, and even touched it with our hands, he says. He says it was made manifest to them and they touched it. All sorts of ancient religion and mystery religion and tribal religions like Islam center on things taboo, things you are not supposed to touch. Religion is about not touching this, not going there, not eating that, not looking at that. But with the inbreaking of the New Covenant and the New Creation in Christ, our relationship to the transcendent is not a matter of taste not touch not. Life itself is handled, and looked upon, and heard.

God had hid himself from the eyes of men in the OC. He hid himself in the tabernacle, covering his glory with a veil. Hiding himself on the mountain with thick dark clouds and fire and thunder and smoke. For Israel's protection, God had to hide his holiness from sinful man behind closed doors and veils and smoke, lest God's holiness destroy them all.

But what John is saying here is that with the coming of Christ and most chiefly in his resurrection, the veil has been lifted. And man has looked God in the face and lived.

Forget Gnosticism, which teaches that the highest ideals and reality of God have little to nothing to do with this earth and the physical flesh. That God is this far off mystery, that this world and its physicality is evil. John teaches that the eternal word of life that was with the Father, and was made manifest to them. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, he says.

The truest truth, the light of all life, that eternal living being from all eternity has been revealed to the Apostles, not in the form of hidden wisdom and knowledge, But in the form of a man. They beheld him, in glory and majesty, and worshipped it in the person of Jesus Christ, touching his pierced side and hands.

Remember Jesus said to his frightened apostles on the first day of the week, "Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." And when He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."

So the Word of Life is indeed the eternal Word of Life which has become a man and which suffered and died by crucifixion and was then resurrected from the dead in a body of flesh and bone. The source of all life does not exist as some impersonal energy force that is devoid of all personality. The Life is not some big bang of energy of meaningless matter that happened to combust. No. The very source of life, has to be an eternal life. The life that has existed for all eternity is the reason there is something rather than nothing, this life which is the very essence and source of life is what we call God, and this Life which creates life by word,

has taken on flesh and bones, and now exists in in the form of a man forever.

And yet, John says that it is this life, this eternal word of life made flesh that we held and saw and heard, is what we testify to and proclaim to you.

THE PRESCHING OF THE WORD OF GOD IS THE WORD OF GOD

Now consider with me what John just said there. *We proclaim to you the eternal life*. He does not say, we proclaim to you a message about eternal life. John says, we proclaim to you the eternal life. What that means, children of God, is that the message and the person of Jesus Christ as the eternal word of life become man cannot be separated. Christ is eternal life, and the message of Christ is also eternal life. They are so united as to be considered one.

Hence Paul says, We preach Christ. This is not a message merely about Christ. But the message of Christ is so connected to the person and work of Christ by the Holy Spirit that the very proclamation of the message is Christ, it is the eternal word of Life.

This reality is why the Second Helvetic Confession says that the preaching of the Word of God Is the Word of God. John is emphasizing that the message of the apostles is identical with the eternal Word of Life become man in Jesus Christ; it took personal form in a person who could be heard and seen and touched.

How many times have you heard an unbeliever say something to the effect that the Bible cannot be trusted because it is written by men? And yet that is no hindrance for John. The proclamation of the message which they apostles declare to us in writing is the message of eternal life. The Good News which the Apostles proclaimed, is recorded in their writings.

Do not be deceived by those who would rob you of your faith and joy because they try to get you to believe that by resting your faith on the writings of men is foolish. First off, what do they base their faith in? The writings of men. But the message of these men, the apostles who saw and beheld and heard and touched the Living Eternal Word, their message of this life is itself eternal life. For Christ has so bound himself to this message by His Spirit that those who believe receive His eternal life within themselves. No other message has the very life and testimony of God bearing witness to it as the Bible does.

There is no other gospel under heaven given unto men whereby we must be saved except Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of Life, born, suffered, crucified, died, buried, resurrected, and ascended. This is the message of eternal life in Christ.

FELLOWSHIP

That which we have seen and heard we also proclaim to you *so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.* ⁴ *And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.*

What is the purpose for which the Life of God was made man and manifest himself to them – it was so that they would have fellowship – koinonia – with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. The apostles were brought into the fellowship of the eternal inter-trinitarian life of love and glory and joy shared between the Father and the Son.

And though they occupy a blessed place in God's plan, they are not the only ones who share in the blessed communion. This is not the Jehovah's Witnesses who teach only 144,000 will be saved. No, no. The whole reason they are proclaiming this Word of Eternal Life to you is so would have fellowship with the apostles. And indeed, John says, our fellowship is with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

Let me say it again: The whole point of the apostle proclaiming this word of Life to us through the written word of this letter is so that by believing in their testimony we could also have fellowship with the Father and the Son.

Now what is this fellowship – this *koinonia*? It was a word used in ancient Greek to describe the intimate union in the marriage relationship. It is the most intimate personal bond people could have. This bond consisted mostly in sharing things in common together. The sharing of things in common, things tangible and intangible, body and spirit, begins to get at the heart of what *koinonia* means.

Now John says that we have a common life together in the Father and the Son. But please notice the order here and how this *koinonia* is possible. First of all – “we have no communion with the Father without the Son; we have no communion with the Son without the Apostles; and we have no communion with the apostles without receiving their written testimony in the communion of the church.”

“Like the life that existed from the beginning, which was with the Father, the life now manifested and available to us is a life of communion, it is a shared life. Scripture knows no life that is not shared life, life together. To paraphrase Paul, life comes from communion and communion comes from hearing and hearing from the word of Life.”¹

In evangelical language, this is the heart at what it means to have a relationship with Jesus. Abraham was called a friend of God, and Jesus called his disciples friends. The reason we are Jesus’ friends, and friends of God is because we share in the common spirit which is shared between the Father and the Son. And the Common Spirit between Father and Son indwells each of individually and corporately as the church, in which the Spirit of Christ is knitting us together to form one new man in Christ so

¹ Peter Leithart, From Behind the Veil, 42-43.

that we all would have fellowship with God the Father and the Son, and the Apostles through their spirit inspired writings and testimony.

Children of God, many think that if only they lived during the time of Christ, then maybe they could believe. Maybe their faith would be stronger. But remember our Gospel lesson today, Jesus said to Thomas, *“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

How have we believed? By the testimony and writings of the apostles. John even says, right after this encounter with Thomas that *“these things were written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*

But the reason the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches exists and is thriving while much of the rest of evangelicalism seems to be dying, is because our communion, our fellowship and koinonia is based upon shared life and belief in the teaching of the Apostles. We believe the Scriptures, and as John says, we have life in Jesus’ name together because we have communion with the apostles in their word, and thus we have fellowship with the Father and the Son. Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is Life. And so we have Life and hope and joy. And of all things I would say that what marks out the CREC as distinct from other churches, it is our hope and joy. But mostly our joy.

What does this life of joy look like? First off, it is indeed a life of Life together. Life is not mere existence, preserved in a plastic wrap in which we are hermetically sealed off from one another with multiple layers veils, separated from each other 6 feet apart, with not more than 10 in a space at one time. That is not life.

The preservation of existence but stripping away the very reason for existing is not life. It is a false life. It is death. Our would be saviors today have told us that we must preserve life by prohibiting the living of it. But

that doesn't work. It can't work. We are not machines. We cannot sacrifice life to preserve life. We cannot sacrifice love to preserve love. It doesn't work that way.

Rather life is the joyous vibrant abounding life which takes place in the grace of community. In eating and drinking together, in singing with one another, in making love, having children, in building together and sharing in projects, ministries, tears, laughter, wealth, evenings of music, and cigars, and praying, playing. We seek to do all of life in the joy of Christ with one another. This is very important for our self understanding and our experience of salvation in Christ. This life together touches upon the very reason we exist.

Which is powerful. Why do you think so many of you have come here? And why more are on their way? Because of my rugged good looks? Its because of life together which flows out of our mutual shared understanding of the Scriptures which invoke great hope and life and joy. In short, we have a living community of fellowship in the Father and the Son.

Now I think if there is anything that the Devil seeks to do it is to break up communities. He hates spirit filled communities of life and love and joy. So he will first of all try to destroy community by injecting heresy and false teaching into the community. But he will also seek to strip life of its joy and make people miserable. And the best way to do that is to prohibit people from being together and experiencing life together. A world where we are prohibited from seeing the smiles on each others faces in everyday interactions is a good place to start to help break apart the shared common life of people together.

But here we are, together, loving one another, loving God together, and believing the Scriptures together – and smiling and laughing and rejoicing and singing the praises of God. This is the foundation of a life of

fellowship and joy in the Father, and the Son and in the Apostles and in one another. What we have and are seeking to develop into greater and greater glory is nothing less than the eternal life of fellowship between the Father and the Son in our midst. And Lord willing our study in 1 John will help us to cultivate this into greater joy and love and light and life.

Amen.

COMMUNION:

On the first day of the week the disciples saw Jesus and heard him and beheld him and touched him. We do not have that privilege today. But Jesus says we are more blessed if we believe having not seen. Because while he dwelt with them in the flesh, he now dwells with us in His Spirit. They could eat with him at his table, but they did not feed on him, so that he became bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh. But we Children of God. We do. Here at this table we receive His Body and Blood which is given unto us for the Life of the World.